

## RIWALIN AND BLANSCHFLUR: THE ICONOGRAPHY OF UNTAMED FANCY

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As the ubiquitous commentator Lollius might have said, "As the twig is bent, so grows the family tree."<sup>1</sup> Although the story of Riwalin and Blanscheflur in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* has received attention as a simple prefigurative device destined for aggrandizement in the main body of the narrative,<sup>2</sup> the negative cast of its literary iconography and the resultant implications for the interpretation of both the pre-history and the story of Tristan and Isolde have been largely ignored. Rather than forming a simple microcosm of what follows, as does Calogrenant's story in Chrétien's *Yvain*, Gottfried's introductory tale of Tristan's parents functions as a first cause of a moral chain of events, much as the story of Uther Pendragon does in the many tales of Arthur. The sins of the father, which are not necessarily repeated by the son, are, however, visited upon him, since a close examination of Gottfried's presentation of the love of Riwalin and Blanscheflur shows it to be of a very different nature from the pure love that he praises in Tristan and Isolde.

It proves useful to consider Gottfried's technique in the presentation of Riwalin and Blanscheflur in light of the prologue to *Tristan*, since, if the story of Gottfried's hero gathers its shape from the story of his progenitors, then this pre-history can in turn be read in terms of what comes before it. In the prologue, Gottfried blends moral posturing and biblical language to create the impression that his relative judgments are moral absolutes. His strategy is not only to set up seemingly universal principles that are later seen to depend totally upon their applicability to the author, as W. T. H. Jackson points out,<sup>3</sup> but also subtly to undercut the very virtues he has commended, in order to make an even more important authorial judgment. For example, Gottfried notes:

Der guote man swaz der in guot  
und niwan der werlt ze guote tuot,  
swer daz iht anders wan in guot  
vernemen wil, der missetuot. (ll. 5-8)<sup>4</sup>

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("We do wrong to receive otherwise than well what a good man does well-meaningly and solely for our good." P. 41.)<sup>5</sup>

Yet he undermines his own seemingly rigid dictum when, less than one hundred and fifty lines later, he states concerning others who recount the story of Tristan and Isolde:

... si sprachen wol  
und niwan uz edelem muote  
mir unde der werlt ze guot.  
binamen si taten ez in guot:  
und swaz der man in guot getuot,  
daz ist ouch guot und wol getan.  
aber als ich gesprochen han,  
daz si niht rehte haben gelesen,  
daz ist, als ich iu sage, gewesen. (ll. 140-148)

("... they wrote well and with the noblest of intentions for my good and the good of us all. They assuredly did so well-meaningly, and whatever is done well-meaningly is indeed good and well done. But when I said that they did not tell the tale aright, this was, I aver, the case." P. 43.)

In effect, the best of intentions do not produce what is right. Despite the fact that Gottfried admits that other redactors of the tale meant well, he assures the reader that *he*, unlike the others, "begunde mich des pinen, / das ich in siner rihte / rihte dise tihte." (ll. 160-162; "was at pains to direct the poem along the right path which he [Thomas of Britain] had shown," p. 43). The tone echoes his previous pseudo-biblical exclamation:

Hei tugent, wie smal sint dine stege,  
wie kumberlich sint dine wege!  
die dine stege, die dine wegen,  
wol ime, der si wege unde stege! (ll. 37-40)

("O Excellence! how narrow are thy paths, how arduous thy ways! Happy the man who can climb thy paths and tread thy ways!" P. 41.)

Absolute principles notwithstanding, the end result is that, despite his good intentions to do justice to other tellers of the same tale, Gottfried leaves no doubt as to whom *he* considers excellent.

Gottfried uses the same technique in describing his hero's antecedents as he does in treating his own literary progenitors, since, as much as he would attest to Riwalin's good qualities and intentions, he consistently deflates the positive aspects of this hero's portrayal. After devoting a scant fifteen lines to the praise of Riwalin's qualities, attributes which can be said to be of the most general, superficial and even titular nature,

Ein herre in Parmenie was,  
der jare ein kint, als ich ez las:  
der was, als uns diu warheit  
an siner aventiure seit,  
wol an gebürte künige genoz,  
an lande vürsten ebengroz,

des libes schoene und wunneclich,  
 getriuwe, küene, milte rich;  
 und den er vröude solte tragen,  
 den was der herre in sinen tagen  
 ein vröude berndiu sunne:  
 er was der werlde ein wunne,  
 der ritterschefte ein lere,  
 siner mage ein ere,  
 sines landes ein zuoversiht: (ll. 245-259)

("There was a lord in Parmenie of tender years, as I read. In birth [so his story truly tells us] he was the peer of kings, in lands the equal of princes, in person fair and charming, loyal, brave, generous, noble: and to those whom it was his duty to make happy this lord in all his days was a joy-giving sun. He was a delight to all, a paragon of chivalry, the glory of his kinsmen, the firm hope of his land." P. 45).

Gottfried immediately proceeds to devote the greater part of the next several hundred lines to the various manifestations in Riwalin of one flaw, arrogance, out of which grows a virtual catalog of the seven deadly sins, and he explicitly states that such shortcomings must inevitably lead to downfall. Close examination of the text not only bears out the essentially fatal style of living that Riwalin adopts, but also reveals Gottfried's skill at damning while appearing to praise.

Shortly after the poet has announced that this hero is "ein vröude berndiu sunne" (l. 255; "a joy-giving sun," p. 45), thus introducing an image that combines height, largesse, and pleasure, he turns this seeming virtue into a vice and informs his audience that Riwalin's nature is defined by overindulgence. The expression "niwan nach sinem willen leben" (l. 264; "and did entirely as he pleased," p. 45) proves ominous and significant, since it becomes not only emblematic of Riwalin but also of the court of Tintagel, of which Gottfried states:

Da haete diu geselleschaft  
 vro unde sere vröudehaft  
 gehütet uf daz grüne gras,  
 als iegeliches wille was,  
 da nach als iegeliche ger  
 ze vröude stuont,  
 da nach lager. (ll. 587-592)

("There in great joy and merriment the company were lodged on the greensward, each according to his whim. As his hope of pleasure prompted him, so was each encamped." P. 49.)

Whim and fancy rule Tintagel, as Gottfried makes clear in his description of the ideal landscape<sup>6</sup> into which Marke's festivities are set, a landscape replete with the conventional birds, fountain, sunshine, breezes, and trees. At the same time he underscores the theme of self-indulgence, as he points out not only that "man vant da, swaz man wolte" (l. 555; "one found whatever one wished there," p. 49) but also:

... swes der gerne sehende man  
 ze sehene guoten muot gewan,  
 daz lie diu state da wol geschehen;  
 man sach da, swaz man wolte sehen. (ll. 613-616)

("And if a man who loved a spectacle took a fancy to seeing anything, opportunity was there to indulge him. One saw what one wanted to see." P. 49.)

The search for pleasure that goes on at Marke's court, based as it is upon self-gratification, has as its end the satisfaction of purely sensual desires, as is evidenced by the sheer number of times reference is made to sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Tintagel's attentiveness to its members' various whims and fancies results in what is tantamount to the furthering of gluttony and vainglory,

ouch vant man da rat über rat,  
 als man ze hohgeziten hat,  
 an spise und edelen waete,  
 des iegelicher haete  
 ze wunsche sich gewarnet dar. (ll. 603-607)

("There were endless stocks of viands and fine clothes, of which all had laid in a fabulous store, as is the way at feasts." P. 49).

and serves as a fitting backdrop for the actions of Riwalin and Blansche-flur, actions which are in no way characterized by restraint on their own part; they simply do what they want to do. Outside forces may intervene and society may determine their lives to a degree—Blansche-flur takes into account the reaction of her brother when it becomes apparent that she will bear tangible fruit of the seeds of her over-indulgence, and Riwalin is, after all, motivated by societal concerns in his very marriage to Blansche-flur—but Gottfried makes clear that each is essentially self-indulgent and only takes others into account when they are hindrances. But more importantly, the indulgence in question is clearly that of the flesh rather than that of the spirit.

Riwalin's self-indulgent and unbridled nature is given appropriate expression in his portrayal as a rider. Gottfried chooses an image that, as D. W. Robertson points out, has extremely negative connotations in its figurative context, since the horse suggests the unrestrained flesh, which can, of course, be bridled by reason.<sup>7</sup> Andreas Capellanus certainly plays upon this meaning in the preface to his well-known treatise on love, when he states that he addresses the work to one Walter, who is having some difficulties curbing his horse.<sup>8</sup> One can by no stretch of the imagination view Riwalin as a man who has reined in his desires; an extremely physical type who can make love while at death's door, he is portrayed primarily in terms of his wants and the means which he employs to obtain his wants. His is a sensual and grasping nature, as is evidenced by the fact that he not only impresses the court ladies with his skill as a rider ("behendeclichen rite," l. 702; "expert horsemanship," p. 50) but also twice rides into

Morgan's land to conquer, making an uneasy year's truce the first time and meeting his death the second. As a rider he first meets and later besieges Blanscheflur (ll. 740-742; p. 51) much as he attacks cities and forces them to yield by imposing his will on them (p. 46; "daz er vil sines willen tete," l. 360). Riwalin not only does what he wants, but he also gets what he wants, and, as Gottfried later points out, he deserves what he gets.

Riwalin's strength and physical charms, described in lines 706-719 (pp. 50-51) may be the actual means by which he conquers lands and women, but his eyes—and, by extension, the eyes of others at the court, since the court seems so admirably suited to Riwalin's style—serve as the advance troops of his army and thus become indirect forces in his conquests. There are numerous references to eyes in the section of the poem dealing with Riwalin and Blanscheflur,<sup>9</sup> and, as a general rule, eyes not only reveal the desired object to the beholder, but also constantly function as self-serving mirrors, thus recalling *luxuria*-Oiseuse's mirror<sup>10</sup> at the entrance to the garden of the *Roman de la Rose*. Her mirror suggests self-love and vanity and, by its positioning in the fleshly garden of Narcissus in Guillaume de Loris's part of the romance—as opposed to the more spiritual garden which Jean de Meun later describes—has negative implications for the love-garden that Gottfried creates in the ideal landscape of Marke's court. When compared to the *Minnegrotte* of the main part of the poem, a non-sensual, transcendent garden removed from society, the garden in which Marke's societal festivities take place functions as a feast for the senses, full of laughter (one recalls Jerome's characterization of the laughing world<sup>11</sup>), dancing, which hints at Chaucer's "olde daunce" at which the Wife of Bath and Pandarus are experts,<sup>12</sup> and endless stocks of viands and fine clothes, which themselves symbolize gluttony and vainglory.

For Riwalin and Blanscheflur, the visual is paramount among the senses. Thus the eye becomes the instrument of covetousness, lust, and ultimately of sin. The progression that Riwalin and Blanscheflur undergo proves interesting in this respect, since it exactly corresponds to the three stages of sin that Saint Augustine describes in *De sermone Domini in monte* (1.12.33-37): suggestion, delight, and consent.<sup>13</sup> The eyes play the deciding role and provide the impetus in this process. One recalls that Gottfried stresses the visual in his introduction of Blanscheflur. When the audience first meets her, she is portrayed as watching the *bohört*, itself a sensual display, since, as Gottfried describes it:

wan dise die riten so riche,  
so rehte keiserliche  
daz ez manic ouge gerne sach (ll. 691-693)

("For these knights rode so superbly, so truly magnificently, that many loved to watch them." P. 50.)

But more importantly, Gottfried's indication that Blanscheflur is to be

understood as dominated by the eye, and thus prey to the consequences of overdependence upon the material world, is graphically expressed in Riwalin's mental musings upon his beloved's appearance. In his mental re-creation of Blanscheflur, which appropriately employs a list of seven areas of the face (seven being the traditional number of creation as well as of sins), Riwalin moves from feature to feature—from hair to brow to temples, to cheeks, mouth, chin, and finally to the eyes, and, in effect, forms a narrowing circle, the focus of which is the eyes (see figure 1).

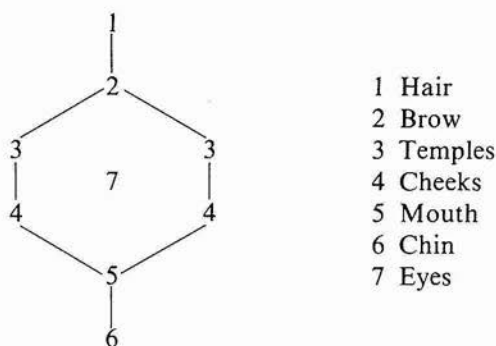


FIG. 1. PROGRESSION OF RIWALIN'S DESCRIPTION OF BLANSCHFLUR.

If this were not enough to associate Blanscheflur with the visual, Marke's sister herself links her eyes to her unhappiness and her self-destruction when she wavers between hatred and love of Riwalin and sorrow and joy at her plight. She states:

ich sach da manegen man und in:  
waz mager mir des, daz min sin  
von den andern allen  
an in einen ist gevallen. (II. 1023-1026)

("... I never looked at him or at any man with hostile eyes nor bore ill will to any. Through what fault of mine can it be that a man whom I regard with a friendly eye should make me suffer." P. 54.)

She subsequently places the blame squarely upon herself, significantly citing the very quality which she shares with Riwalin:

min tumber meisterloser muot  
der ist, der mir da leide tuot,  
der ist, der minen schaden wil. (II. 1045-1047)

("My foolish, unbridled fancy—that is what harms me so, that is what is out to ruin me." Pp. 54-55.)

She goes on to rail against her desire but ultimately succumbs to her longings and allows her eyes to feed love's fire (II. 1116-1118; p. 55). That

this fire leads not only to consummation but also to consumption sets Riwalin and Blanscheffur apart from Tristan and Isolde; it is significant that nowhere in reference to Tristan and Isolde does Gottfried employ the pejorative image of burning desire.

The eye works as the agent for Riwalin's undoing as well. Gottfried informs his audience, combining motifs of inclination, horsemanship, and the visual in such a fashion that no doubt is left as to their interrelation on the negative level of the sensual:

Nu daz der buhurt do zergie  
und sich diu ritterschaft zerlie  
und iegelicher kerte  
dar in sin muote gelerte,  
do kamez von aventiure also,  
daz Riwalin gekerte do,  
da Blanscheffur diu schoene saz,  
hie mite gesprancter naher baz  
und als er under ir ougen sach,  
vil minnecliche er zuo zir sprach. (ll. 733-742)

("Now that the bohort was over and the knights were dispersing and each making his way to where his thoughts inclined him, it chanced that Rivalin was heading for where lovely Blanscheffur was sitting. Seeing this, he galloped up to her and looking her in the eyes saluted her most pleasantly." P. 51.)

Thoughts and eyes together lead Riwalin to Blanscheffur, who, as a woman and daughter of Eve, can be seen negatively, as a representation of the flesh.<sup>14</sup> In the downward progression to sin, the suggestion of the eye is followed by the delight that the mind takes in what it has seen, and consequently Riwalin and Blanscheffur's separate ponderings reveal a negative cast that can only be followed by the consequences of untamed fancy: consent.

In a consideration of the important intermediary step of mental reflection, the bird simile, which Gottfried chooses to characterize Riwalin's state of mind and later employs in a similar context to describe Isolde's situation, proves a particularly apt means by which to portray facets of Riwalin's personality. The bellicose and self-destructive nature of Tristan's father is well couched in the bird's efforts to free itself:

so sleht er danne uz aller craft  
dar und dar und aber dar,  
unz er ze jungeste gar  
sich selben veltend übersiget  
und gelimet an dem zwise liget. (ll. 854-858)

("So now it strikes with all its might, here, there, and everywhere, till at last, fighting itself, it overcomes itself and lies limed along the twig." P. 52.)

Similarly, one recalls the self-destructive efforts of the bear, which is explicitly linked to Riwalin. Gottfried discusses Riwalin's attitude and states ominously:



hie vahet man den bern mite:  
 der richet einzele schaden,  
 unz er mit schaden wirt beladen.  
 (ll. 284-286)

("... one catches bears with it. For a bear gives blow for blow until he is overwhelmed with blows." P. 45.)

The informing war-like spirit behind the image of the bear hammer, which links overmuch desire and strength implemented ostensibly to achieve the object of one's desires but really to conquer oneself, becomes instrumental in the portrayal of man as the agent of his own destruction and reappears in the bird-lime simile, where the battle may be between bird and lime on a literal level but is certainly the self against the self's desires on another level. Gottfried next calls the audience's attention to the exact parallel he wishes to make:

reht in der selben wise tuot  
 der unbetwungene muot (ll. 859-860)

("This is just how untamed fancy behaves." P. 52.)

The point that Gottfried makes concerning untamed fancy is a difficult and complicated one to assess. On the one hand, the audience is informed of the positive aspects of love: it possesses "süeze" (l. 866; "sweetness," p. 52), it fires glances with "vröuderichen osterlac" (l. 927; "joyous Easter day," p. 53), and it even makes a new man of Riwalin ("eine niuwe leben wart ime gegeben," l. 938; "a new life was given him," p. 53). On the other hand, for every positive aspect described, not only one negative quality that directly counterbalances the positive force appears, but rather several others come immediately to mind as well, all products of untamed fancy. Lest the audience give too much weight to love's sweetness, Gottfried introduces its "senelicher swaere" (l. 863; "lovelorn sadness ['heaviness' would seem to be a better translation]," p. 52), a figurative weight which, as can be expected, drags the lover down, with all the negative implications of the downward progression gaining strength from the image of the limed bird laid out on the twig, prevented from ascending. By virtue of its wings, the bird serves as a universal symbol of the spiritual,<sup>15</sup> and the bird bound to the twig, associated with untamed fancy, "der unbetwungene muot" (l. 860), suggests that the desire for the material serves to ground the bird and implies that tamed fancy—as opposed to untamed, which ironically brings the bird *down*—would allow the bird to soar. But more importantly, Gottfried indicates that fancy, when reined in, would not create the sort of love that so plagues Riwalin, presumably because it would not engender a love based on the visual and tangible.

In consideration of the Easter Day image, one must take into account the type of "resurrection" that Riwalin undergoes in order to see precisely how Gottfried undercuts the conventional and positive associations called



forth by this image.<sup>16</sup> The inappropriateness of the Easter Day image becomes initially apparent when one considers the total absence of non-ironic references to the deity and the heavenly in this part of the poem.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, after the lovers have consummated their relationship, Gottfried explicitly states:

so was ir werltwunne vol,  
so was in sanfte und also wol,  
daz si enhaeten niht ir leben  
umb kein ander himelriche gegeben (ll. 1369-1372)

("their worldly joy was so entire, they felt so appeased and contented, that they would not have given this life of theirs for any heavenly kingdom." Pp. 58-59.)

Here one sees that what Riwalin and Blanscheflur feel for each other, rather than leading to a love of God and neighbor,<sup>18</sup> leads to the opposite. In his love for Blanscheflur, Riwalin violates his neighbor Marke's hospitality and, as the above citation demonstrates, rejects heaven as well, an act which can clearly be identified with *cupiditas*.

Thus, Riwalin and Blanscheflur share "eine liebe und eine ger" (l. 1357; "one delight and one desire," p. 58) and fix upon each other "herze . . . sin . . . gernder muot" (l. 1352; "heart, mind, desire ['sense' for 'mind' might be better here]," p. 58), as opposed to Tristan and Isolde, who recognize that they have in common three things and lack the quality of excessive desire expressed in the "ger" and "gernder" applied to Riwalin and Blanscheflur. Tristan and Isolde must also be viewed as spiritual lovers not only in their enmity to Marke's material court but also in their basic unity.<sup>19</sup> One notes, in contrast to Tristan and Isolde, that both Riwalin and Blanscheflur are characterized by wavering duality, which is, as Hugh of Saint Victor points out, a characteristic of the mundane, expressed in its transitoriness and corruptibility,<sup>20</sup> and which in the case of Tristan's parents is expressed not only in their mental vacillation and contortions, but also in actual physical transformations, as in Blanscheflur's alternate fainting and re-viving and Riwalin's frequent movement between life and death.

In the passage where Gottfried describes Riwalin's metaphorical "re-birth," one may hazard that new life may indeed be given to Riwalin,

eine niuwe leben wart ime gegeben:  
er verwandelte da mite  
als sine sinne und sine site  
und wart mit alle ein ander man;  
wan allez daz, des er began,  
daz was mit wunderlichen siten  
und mit blintheit undersniten.  
sin ane geborne sinne  
die waren von der minne  
als wilde und also unstaete,  
als ers erbeten haete.  
sin leben begunde swachen. (ll. 937-949)

("a new life was given him; so that he changed his whole cast of mind and became quite a different man, since all that he did was chequered with strangeness and blindness. His native disposition had grown as wild and capricious from love as he had asked for. His life took a turn for the worse." P. 53).

but it is not the conventional reversal founded on new purpose and understanding. Riwalin's "new life" lacks the renunciation of earth's sensual pleasures implied in the New Man *topos*<sup>21</sup> and can in no way be taken as a positive progression on Riwalin's part. In fact, the downward turn hinted at by the bear hammer and the bird lime images finds its heightened expression in the blindness that accompanies Riwalin's transformation, a blindness that is ironically due to the overuse of the eye as it views the material and transitory and gains delight from this. In other words, the myopia of limited vision is brought about by the excessive dependence upon the eye. Moreover, Riwalin's personality, which has already been seen to be of a grasping, sensual and undisciplined nature, becomes even more untamed and capricious, thus emphasizing that the situation is taking an ever-worsening, degenerative course that parallels Blanscheflur's giving in to her "masterless" ("meisterlos") fancy and the consequence of her consent to sin, which is death.

Riwalin and Blanscheflur provide striking examples of the consequences of untamed fancy and illustrate Gottfried's contention that surfeits of qualities, even when they are initially good qualities and are outward-directed with others as the object, can become negative and inward-directed and can double back to harm and cripple the subject. Thus the use of the eye in moderation can reveal much that is hidden and can further knowledge.<sup>22</sup> Just as over-dependence upon the eye ironically leads to blindness and abundance of untamed fancy results in even more capriciousness, however, so does excess of wrath—which in moderation can be righteous—lead to even more wrath in Riwalin's case. Accordingly, the anger that is the outgrowth of Riwalin's arrogance not only injures others, as he lays waste to towns and lands, but also works to destroy himself as well. In this light one recalls one particular instance of Riwalin's wrath, which in this case appears to be unjustified:

so greifer Morganen an  
als einen schuldegen man (ll. 345-346)

("he attacked Morgan as if Morgan had done him some wrong." P. 46.)

Riwalin simply cannot overlook a wrong, as Gottfried tells his audience:

vertragen, daz doch vil manic man  
in michelem gewalte kan,  
dar an gedahte er selten;  
übel mit übele gelten,  
craft erzeigen wider craft:  
dar zuo was er gedanchaft.

Nun loufet ez die lenge niht,  
 der allez daz, daz ime geschiht,  
 mit Karles lote gelten wil.  
 weiz got, der man muoz hartes vil  
 an disem borge übersehen  
 oder ime muoz dicke schade geschehen.  
 (ll. 269-280)

("It never occurred to him to overlook a wrong, as many do who wield great power; but returning evil for evil, matching force with force: to this he gave much thought. Now it cannot last for ever when a man pays back each wrong that he suffers in coin of the realm. Heaven knows that in the give-and-take of life a man must shut his eyes to a great deal, else he will often come to grief." P. 45.)

Here one recognizes not only a covert reference to Riwalin's material nature in the mention of the coin of the realm,<sup>23</sup> but also a curious inversion of what Gottfried has previously stated in his prologue. Instead of repaying good with good, as Gottfried suggests, Riwalin repays evil with evil. Clearly, then, Riwalin cannot be considered "good" himself if he, as Gottfried tells the audience, not only has no good intentions, but also if he consistently returns evil for evil, even though the poet is quick to add that Riwalin's youth is responsible for his downfall:

daz aber er ie ze schaden kam,  
 dazn kam von archeite niht,  
 da von doch manegem schade geschiht:  
 ez kam von dem geleite  
 siner kintheite. (ll. 290-294)

("But his downfall was due not to malice, which is the ruin of many, but to the tender years that accompanied him." P. 45.)

One might, however, look to other unmistakable hints that Gottfried gives his audience to indicate that it may perhaps be less youth than a general attitude that accounts for Riwalin's demise. Indeed, the very imagery of ascent and descent that is interspersed throughout the tale of Riwalin's life lays the foundation for the contention that Riwalin's undoing comes about because he has, in effect, embraced the Wheel of Fortune and chooses to go up and down with it rather than to act according to the dictates of Providence. Riwalin states upon entrance to Marke's court:

binamen got selbe der hat mich  
 ze diseme lantgesinde braht!  
 min saelde hat mich wol bedaht (ll. 496-498)

("God himself has brought me to these people. Fortune has been kind to me." P. 48.)

Riwalin's casual coupling of God and Fortune, two forces at odds with each other,<sup>24</sup> as well as his constant attendance to his whims, indicate that he is thoroughly preoccupied with the earthly and transitory rather than with the heavenly and eternal.

Gottfried develops the same driving force behind the Wheel of Fortune in

his temporally based image of the day star and evening:

do sin leben ze leben vienc,  
 uf alse der tagesterne gienc  
 und lachend in die werlde sach,  
 do wander, des doch niene gesach,  
 daz er iemer also solte leben  
 und in der lebenden süeze sweben.  
 nein, sin es lebes begin  
 der gie mit kurzem lebene hin;  
 diu morgenliche sunne  
 siner werltwunne,  
 do diu von erste spilen began  
 do viel sin gaehere abent an,  
 der ime vor was verborgen,  
 und laschte im sinen morgen. (ll. 305-318)

("When his life began in earnest to rise up like the day-star and look out smiling on the world, he thought—but it did not happen so—that he would always live like this and revel in the sweets of living. But no, his life that had scarce begun was soon spent. Just when the early sun of his worldly joy was about to shine out dazzlingly, his evening, hidden from him till then, fell suddenly and blotted out his morn." P. 46.)

In a related passage somewhat later in the narrative, Rual li Foitenant addresses Riwalin:

iuwer ere wehset alle wis,  
 iuwer werdekeit und iuwer pris,  
 iuwer vröude und iuwer wunne  
 diu stiget als diu sunne. (ll. 1613-1616)

("your honour increases in every way! Your esteem and reputation, your happiness and joy mount like the sun!" Pp. 60-61.)

In the first case, that of the dawn and evening metaphor, the downward turn of the Wheel of Fortune is implicit as well as explicit—the mention of the day star suggests proud Lucifer, the fallen one, and evening darkness blots out morning brightness, bringing to a close the cycle of the rising and falling sun—and in the second case, that of Riwalin's rising reputation, the climbing of the sun is counteracted by the subsequent fall of Riwalin in battle, which significantly occurs almost immediately after Rual's optimistic statement. In the narrative that connects these two statements one becomes aware of many smaller ups and downs that bear Boethian implications, as well as of supportive circular imagery, which, in suggesting the Wheel of Fortune, functions both to contain and to express real lack of progression. To illustrate, the upward climb of the Wheel can be seen in the flight of the bird before it lights on the limed twig, Gottfried's characterization of the lovers after consummation,

wan in ir anevange,  
 dos allerbeste lebeten  
 und in dem wunsche swebeten

(ll. 1374-1376)

("For in their prime, when they were at the summit of their joys, and reveling in bliss," p. 59),

and in Riwalin's rising from his death bed. The downward turn of the Wheel is suggested by the many references to heaviness,<sup>25</sup> Riwalin's fall on the battlefield defending Marke's lands, his final fall to earth in death, Blansche-flur's swoons, and her final fainting to the ground upon learning of Riwalin's death. In addition, the spirits of both lovers constantly rise and fall as they mull over in their minds the passion they feel for each other. The prevailing movement, however, is circular, because no real, permanent height is obtained; Riwalin and Blansche-flur rise only to fall.

Riwalin and Blansche-flur are doomed because submission to their untamed fancy and desires for self-gratification is tantamount to acceptance of Fortune. Their love may be called tragic, but not because it simply has a sad ending; rather, as Robertson explains, medieval tragedy can be defined as placing oneself upon Fortune's wheel. He cites Chaucer's *Troilus* as a prime example, since this character "subjects himself to Fortune through an unworthy love"<sup>26</sup> and thus spurns divine Providence. Robertson goes on to note:

In medieval tragedy, the manner in which a tragic figure subjects himself to Fortune and thus falls into the order of justice is always clear. He falls in the footsteps of Adam. There are, it is true, a number of ways in which the Fall of Adam may be seen; but it is impossible to regard Adam's initial appetite for 'forbidden fruit' as good, however providential its results may have been.<sup>27</sup>

Since Gottfried's portrayal of Riwalin and Blansche-flur is so overwhelmingly negative, based as it is upon arrogance and lust and containing elements of wrath, doubt, gluttony, covetousness, vainglory, and avarice,<sup>28</sup> it cannot function as a thematic prefigurative device for Tristan and Isolde, who are presented in a predominantly positive light in terms of mystical, alchemical, and numerological imagery, as compared to the dark, negative forces of Marke's court. To be sure, certain images that occur in the characterization of Tristan's parents recur in the description of Tristan and Isolde: the limed bird, the love-hate dilemma, and the love-death association suggest themselves, but, as Collings notes, they appear in different contexts and with different consequences.<sup>29</sup> In fact, the closer one looks, the more obvious it becomes that Gottfried has consciously effected an inversion of sorts in his progress from the prehistory to the actual tale, an inversion which could be diagrammed in the following criss-cross fashion:



Consider, for example, the portrayal of Marke in the pre-history. The young king of Cornwall appears to be a good ruler—the audience is certainly not told that he is a bad one—and is called "Marke der tugende riche" (l. 485;

"Mark, noble man," p. 48); as such, rich in virtues, he stands in diametrical opposition to the man whom he receives into his court, a man who becomes a walking catalog of vices. Riwalin recognizes Marke's excellence and states:

swaz ich von Markes tugenden ie  
gehorte sagen, deist allez hie.  
sin leben daz ist höfisch unde guot.  
(ll. 499-501)

("All that I ever heard on the subject of Marke's excellence is here borne out in full. His is a good and courtly way of life." P. 48.)

This recalls Gottfried's praise of excellence and virtue in the prologue. Marke is also called "der guote" (l. 627; "the good," p. 49) and "der werde" (l. 656; "the noble," p. 50) and serves not only as a good friend to Riwalin but also as a strong king who does not hesitate to defend his lands against invaders. Most importantly, as his sister is quick to note, Marke is likely to punish sexual indiscretion and illicit love strongly:

min bruoder und min herre  
so der an mit dise ungeschiht  
und ouch sin selbes laster sint,  
der heizet mich verderben  
und lesterliche ersterben. (ll. 1470-1474)

("When my royal brother sees this remissness in me, not to mention his own dishonour, he will bid me be destroyed and put to a shameful death." P. 60.)

Nevertheless, Marke can overlook a wrong—he does, after all, forgive Riwalin and Blanscheflur posthumously and welcomes their son to his court. The poet opposes him to Riwalin, whose wrath causes him to return evil for evil and who cannot forget an injury done to him.

The Marke in the main body of the story is a sorry character, however, with traits that are as diametrically opposed to those he is granted in the pre-history as are the qualities of the pre-history's lovers to Tristan and Isolde. When Marke deals with Tristan and Isolde in the main narrative, he is presented as a pitiful, weak cuckold who vacillates between the extremes of doubt and belief and hence well earns the epithet of "der zwivelaere" ("the waverer"). He rules a society of hunters,<sup>30</sup> rather than warriors, and needs a hero from the outside to rid his land of tribute-demanding Morold. Furthermore, he is so ineffectual that he earns the respect neither of his courtiers nor of his wife and nephew. One might say that Marke in the second part of the story takes on some of the negative characteristics of Riwalin and Blanscheflur or at the very least bears striking resemblance to Tristan's parents. Even as Riwalin and Blanscheflur were totally dependent upon their eyes and the pleasure that vision can bring, Marke is eye-oriented as well. He, however, is shackled with limited vision and misperception, with the result that he not only succumbs to lust but also cannot distinguish good from evil and truth from lies, a failure that is metaphorically represented by his inability



to tell brass from gold.<sup>31</sup> One might even view Gottfried's reference to "Karles lote" (l. 277; "coin of the realm," p. 45) as thematically related to the "bettegelte" (l. 12609; "bed money," p. 207) in which Marke is paid on his wedding night; both Riwalin and Marke are arch-materialists and have concern with monetary (hence, earthly) value of things. Similarly, Riwalin's description as a man warring against his own happiness (ll. 295-297; p. 45) is not far removed from Marke's characterization as a man chasing after his own sorrow (ll. 15230ff.; p. 242). Thus both become agents of their own destruction. Marke's association with the hunt links him to the horse and the fleshly implications that were discussed previously in reference to Riwalin. Marke's lust dominates him. Coupled with his characteristic misperception, his lust results in his undoing. But most of all, Riwalin and Marke are both waverers; in his thoughts of Blanscheflur, Riwalin moves between extremes, much as Marke vacillates in his perception of the true situation. In each case, the man sees only what he wants to see, Riwalin according to his whim and Marke according to his basic need to be blinded to the truth.

If the Marke in the second part of the tale can be seen to take on some of the negative characteristics of Tristan's parents, then Tristan and Isolde can be understood to share certain positive qualities with the Marke of the pre-history, qualities such as nobility and excellence and loyalty. In this, however, Gottfried makes his point less by the presence of good qualities than by the absence of bad ones. In other words, the poet says little about Marke in the pre-history, but all that he says is good, whereas he says a considerable amount about Riwalin and Blanscheflur, and an overwhelming majority of this must be construed in a negative fashion. Similarly, Gottfried leaves no doubt in the main story that the lovers are to be viewed in a positive light, while those societal forces that oppose Tristan and Isolde, among which Marke is prominent, must be seen as evil.<sup>32</sup> As Gottfried would have it, the debilitating weight on the moral scales is clearly on the side of evil; for this reason, Marke's fame is said to be in its ascendent in the pre-history (p. 47; "des ere wuohs do starke," l. 424), but Marke in the second part of the story assiduously pursues his own downfall, which, as it results in knowledge, indicates his "fallen" nature, since knowledge is a primary consequence of the biblical Fall. Similarly, Riwalin and Blanscheflur ride the Wheel of Fortune, sometimes ascending but ultimately descending. In the final analysis, both Tristan's parents and Marke in the second part of the story are doomed. Thus it is with particular irony that Gottfried concludes his pre-history. The kingdom is leaderless and in ruins, war is imminent, Riwalin and Blanscheflur are both dead and leave a son with the inauspicious name of "Tristan," which, as Gottfried informs his audience, comes from "triste," which means "sorrow." Thus the man who is initially described as being "eine vröude berndiu sunne" (l. 255; "a joy-giving sun," p. 45) to his people has actually rained disaster upon them and upon himself.



## NOTES

1. See *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957), *House of Fame*, line 1467 and *Troilus*, line 394. "Why he [Chaucer] thought, or pretended to think, that he was translating from a Latin original by the unknown 'Lollius' has never been fully explained; but it has been suggested that he got the notion from the opening lines of the second epistle of the first book of Horace" (Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, trans. Neville Coghill [Baltimore: Penguin, 1971], p. 312).
2. See Lucy G. Collings, "Structural Prefiguration in Gottfried's *Tristan*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 72 (1973): 378-389. This wide-ranging article deals with prefigurative devices throughout the work; as such, attention paid to the pre-history is limited. Collings mentions the motifs of love, death, wounds, and medicine, but for the most part underplays the negative implications of the pre-history's imagery. See also W. T. H. Jackson, *The Anatomy of Love: The Tristan of Gottfried von Strassburg* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 65ff., for a discussion of Tristan's parents' love, as opposed to Tristan-love. "Gottfried has approached the problem of falling in love in two completely different ways. His first pair of lovers are motivated by the social conventions and by visual, physical proximity" (p. 67); "Gottfried realizes that it would be less than artistic to posit a complete contrast between the love of Tristan and Isolde to that of Tristan's parents. All loves have something in common, and Tristan derives his being from Riwalin and Blanscheflur" (p. 69). Jackson, however, does not go into detail to discuss the negative aspects of Riwalin and Blanscheflur's love.
3. See "The Stylistic Use of Word-Pairs and Word-Repetitions in Gottfried's 'Tristan,'" *Euphorion* 59 (1965): 229-251; as well as *Anatomy of Love*, pp. 49ff.
4. Line numbers in the text refer to the edition of Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan und Isolde*, ed. Friedrich Ranke, 7th ed. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1963).
5. Page numbers in the text refer to the following translation: Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan with the Tristan of Thomas*, trans. A. T. Hatto (Baltimore: Penguin, 1960).
6. See Ernst Robert Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern: Francke, 1948), pp. 191ff; as well as Michael S. Batts, "The Idealised Landscape in Gottfried's 'Tristan,'" *Neophilologus* 46 (1962): 226-233.
7. See D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), especially pp. 30, 194, and 254.
8. Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John J. Parry (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), p. 27: "you do not know how to manage your horse's reins properly. . . ."
9. See lines 544, 552, 568, 573, 613, 616, 638, 641, 663, 693, 741, 928, 984, 989, 1012, 1016, 1033, 1084, 1101, 1116, 1169, 1254, 1283, 1302, 1391, and 1726, to name several.
10. See Robertson, *Preface to Chaucer*, pp. 92ff.
11. Jerome's image derives ultimately from Anselm of Canterbury; see *Patrologia Latina* 158, 1073: "si mundus, vel aliquid eorum quae sunt mundi, ridet tibi. . . ."
12. See Robertson, *Preface to Chaucer*, p. 134.
13. See *ibid.*, pp. 72-74.
14. See Arthur K. Moore, *Studies in Medieval Prejudice: Antifeminism* (Nashville: University Libraries, 1943). For woman as a representation of the flesh, see Robertson's discussion, *Preface to Chaucer*, pp. 74-75.
15. J. E. Clirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library), p. 25.

16. Of course, the Easter Day eye image appears in the works of the *Minnesänger* Reinmar der Alte.

17. See, for example, lines 496, 506, 705-706, 717, 743, 746, 982, 1328, 1509, 1603, 1710, and 1728.

18. In his *On Christian Doctrine* 3.10.16, Saint Augustine discusses the difference between the two loves, *caritas* (directed toward neighbor and God) and *cupiditas* (self-directed). See Robertson, *Preface to Chaucer*, pp. 25ff. for a cogent discussion of the reconciliation of the two loves.

19. The material nature of Marke's court is indicated on one level by its association to base and unrefined metals which are low in the alchemical process. The surveillance practiced by the court is likened to lead (l. 17847; p. 276), the metal lowest in the alchemical progression, and Marke himself cannot distinguish between brass (Brangaene) and gold (Isolde); his misperception actually debases, since he sees lesser metals where he should see gold. Iron, also a lower metal, forms a working symbol of society in its use in weapons and in the hot iron ordeal. One might also consider Tristan and Isolde's flight into the mountains (indication of an upward, spiritual direction) to a cave described in allegorical terms and characterized by the spiritual numbers 1 and 3 as tangible proof of their distance, physical and otherwise, from Marke's court.

See l. 12171 and the entire Cave of Lovers sequence for indication that the two have become one. Thus 1 + 1 does not equal 2 but rather 1.

20. See *Patrologia Latina* 175, 22.

21. See Robertson, *Preface to Chaucer*, pp. 379-382. Consider as well Yvain's rebirth in Chrétien's poem. He is "born again" and awakens from madness to new purpose and even receives a different name, the Knight of the Lion. See also Walther von der Vogelweide's famous poem 124, 1 ("Owe war sint verschwunden alliu miniu jar"), where the *persona* attempts a reversal, a shifting from concern with the transitory to concern with the eternal.

22. Tom Artin, *The Allegory of Adventure: Chrétien's Erec and Yvain* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1974), pp. 32ff, discusses the nature of parables in light of Christ's statement in Mark 4:11-12 about "seeing" and "hearing."

23. One might draw parallels to the many biblical references to money, particularly to the rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar's (Matthew 22:21).

24. Robertson, *Preface to Chaucer*, pp. 473-474.

25. See, for example, lines 795, 863, 920, 935, 979, and 1679.

26. Robertson, *Preface to Chaucer*, p. 473.

27. Ibid., p. 44. See also John Anson, "The Hunt of Love: Gottfried von Strassburg's 'Tristan' as Tragedy," *Speculum* 45 (1970): 594-607. Anson, however, disregards totally the positive, even mystical aspects of Tristan and Isolde's love and condemns them wholeheartedly as sinners. In reference to Adam, it proves interesting to note that in Gottfried's poem there are three references to Adam and Eve (l. 12605ff., 17933ff., and 18162), the most important of which comes in the scene when Tristan and Isolde meet in the orchard for the last time. In this scene, the emphasis on bedclothes (when Isolde prepares the couch and when Marke sees the Lovers) can be taken as an indication of the covering of nakedness (there is no mention of bed linen for the crystalline bed in the Cave of Lovers) and as such a reference to the Fall and a testament of the "fallen" nature of the Lovers since they have returned to society.

28. One can also posit envy, since avarice causes Riwalin to covet and envy others their property, and sloth, if Riwalin and Blanscheflur's worldly contentment can be said to have degenerated to that degree.

29. Collings, "Structural Prefiguration," p. 387, points out the progression, for example, from the simile to the metaphor in relation to the bird lime and love.

30. The hunt can, of course, be seen *in bono* (the hunt for Christ) but in Marke's case can be best understood *in malo* (the hunt of Venus); for a discussion of the hunt as a figurative device, see Marcelle Thiébaux, *The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

31. This occurs initially in the scene in which virginal Brangaene (brass—she is also referred to as the moon and therefore silver elsewhere) is substituted for Isolde (gold) in the marriage bed. The same theme recurs when Marke finds the lovers together in the orchard; the passage describing the discovery is written from Marke's perspective and the inability to tell whether the lovers formed a piece of bronze or gold attests to the fact that Marke still cannot tell base metal from gold.

32. The alchemical subtheme (see notes 19 and 31 as well as Peter Ober, "Alchemy and the 'Tristan' of Gottfried von Strassburg," *Monatshefte* 57 [1965]: 321-335) is complemented by a numerological symbolism. The lovers are referred to by the numbers three or one (when they achieve union), whereas societal forces are dualistic (for example, Marke's wavering between two alternatives) and multiplistic and are often characterized by the number four (Morold's strength, the evil steward's association with the number four [l. 9107; p. 161], Gottfried's reference to Marke as the fourth person ["in Markes kemenaten/was nieman wan si vieriu./der künec selbe und si driu," ll. 12584-12586; "There were none but these four in Mark's chamber: the King himself and the three," p. 207, which explicitly makes Marke the fourth person], and rituals such as the quartering of the hart and the investiture scene, presided over by four Splendours). Elementary number symbolism (see Edmund Reiss, "Number Symbolism and Medieval Literature," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, N.S. 1 [1970], 161ff.; and Vincent F. Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism: Its Sources, Meaning, and Influence on Thought and Expression*, Columbia University Studies in English and Comparative Literature 132 [New York: Columbia University Press, 1938] for a basic, although occasionally inaccurate, study) bears out *in bono* connotations of the numbers three and one (the divine) and *in malo* connotations of two and four (the transitory and the profane earth). Gottfried employs these well-known connotations to support his themes of the conflict between the individual (3) and society (4), between the mystic (1) and the world he wishes to renounce (2), and between the artist (1 and 3) and the knight (2 and 4). Modern scholarship has seen an understanding of all these themes to be paramount in an understanding of Gottfried's poem. The evil nature of Marke's court is demonstrated not only in the association with base metals and the societal number four, but also in the characterization of Melot (called the snake), Marjodoc (labeled the cur) and Marke himself (the king who is as petty and wavering as the god who theoretically blesses his kingdom).